

JOINT RAINFOREST CRC & CRC REEF MEDIA RELEASE

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Reef Water Quality Protection Plan – the next chapter

One of the key drivers behind the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan, Sheriden Morris promises a provocative presentation challenging the current direction of water quality research when she speaks out at the “Rainforest meets Reef” conference in Townsville today.

“Will our current approach to research deliver the outcomes needed for the successful management of water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef?” asks Ms Morris, who currently manages the Great Barrier Reef Catchment Theme for CSIRO’s Water for a Healthy Country program.

She will propose that current research has stopped short at answering the important ‘so what?’ questions that are needed for management.

Research focus needs to shift to be both mission directed and solution based if it is to play a strong role in the future management of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan represents a strategic alliance between the Australian and Queensland governments, industry groups and the community to address the decline in Reef water quality. The development of the Reef Plan was driven by the recognition that declining water quality was affecting GBR ecosystems and a better understanding of the industries of the GBR catchment and their impact on declining water quality. The Reef Plan’s goal is to halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the Reef within 10 years.

For this to be achieved reef science needs to engage the end user groups at the start of the program Ms Morris says. “If the end user group is an after thought ... the answers being delivered to them are often considered patchy and not terribly convincing.”

“It comes as no surprise that graziers in the upper Catchment would be suspicious about claims that their activities could impact on the Reef. This suspicion impedes the pathways for change. We have known for years the benefits of having producers participate in research but generally don’t bother because it is often difficult and time consuming.”

The challenge for water quality science now is to integrate the biophysical understanding of the system with an understanding of the social and economic drivers.

‘It is people’s interaction with the landscape that has caused the problem and it is people’s interaction with the landscape that will eventually solve the problem,’ Ms Morris added.

The Rainforest meets Reef conference has been organised by both Rainforest and Reef CRCs and hosted at the Southbank Convention Centre, South Townsville- 22-24 November.

Don’t miss Ms Sheriden Morris present at 8:15am Wednesday 23 November.

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